

Dynamics of growth and development put enormous strain on land use activities in urban historic areas. New spatial patterns emerge that lead to both visual and functional contradictions, which are manifest in the inappropriate scale in urban historic areas. The variety and complexity inherent in traditional cities is being replaced by insipid high-rise accommodation. The Old Town of Mombasa, Kenya, is one such historic area that is losing its historic built heritage and individuality at an alarming rate. Mombasa has been a leading trading town for centuries thereby creating an architectural legacy of historic buildings and spaces. Its old town has ornately carved doors, covered balconies, narrow streets and alleyways, rendering it a truly unique character. The study posits that the standards and guidelines governing conservation ignore community participation, hence the social disconnect and visual contradictions. This study seeks to establish the residents' attitudes towards this environment. It further endeavours to establish the factors underlying the resident's perception of their urban historic neighbourhood. A field survey involving a sample of 693 residents was conducted along a semantic differential scale, in order to elicit their attitude towards built environment. Principal Component Analysis, based on correlation matrices, was used to uncover the latent structure of a large set of variables that influence the residents' perception of their conserved area. The results indicate that conservation in the old town should strive to achieve appropriate order, maintenance and upkeep, scale, create serial vision; open views and panoramas where possible, enhance orientation and continuity, and achieve the necessary complexity without creating information overload or monotony. This flexible approach forms the basis of a framework for conservation of the local distinctiveness, so that the built heritage is experiential and not habitual.

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